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SUBJECT: TIP IN THE MEKONG: THE EXPERIENCE OF CAN THO PROVINCE

REF: A. HCMC 456
[B. HCMC 437](#)

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: During an April visit by ConGen officers to the Mekong Delta province of Can Tho, provincial police and Women's Union officials reviewed their enforcement and education outreach efforts to combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP). The officials demonstrated an understanding of the challenges in combating trafficking but complained that a lack of resources and training prevents an expansion of their modest programs. Although accurate numbers are hard to obtain, the need is evident: local press claims that at least 10,000 persons -- most from Mekong Delta provinces -- have been trafficked to Cambodia in the past. Women's Union officials also discussed their efforts to minimize the impact of the marriage of Vietnamese women to foreigners. End Summary.

Can Tho Police

[1](#)2. (SBU) In mid-April, ConGen officers traveled to the Mekong Delta province of Can Tho to review Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issues with police and Women's Union representatives. (Ref A reports on the views of a Can Tho-based reporter who covers TIP and women's issues in the Mekong Delta.) Huynh Van Hanh, Deputy Chief of the Can Tho anti-TIP Department, and Nguyen Huynh Trang, Vice Director, Can Tho Police, told us that since 1997, 37 trafficking victims have returned to Can Tho Province, 34 from Cambodia, one from Singapore and two from China. The women who had been trafficked to Cambodia were forced to work as prostitutes. Of the 34 returnees from Cambodia, five later died of AIDS. Four left Can Tho province for elsewhere in Vietnam. In the Singapore case, a local woman married a Singaporean man. About five weeks after she had arrived in Singapore, her husband locked her in a room and tried to sell her to another family in Singapore. The woman escaped and fled to the Vietnamese Embassy, which repatriated her to Can Tho. The other case concerned two women who were deceived and trafficked to mainland China. Can Tho police coordinated with central-level counterparts in the Ministry of Public Security and with the PRC police to return the women to Vietnam. No further details on these cases were disclosed.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The police added that since 1997, they have prevented seven cases of trafficking involving 16 people from Can Tho and other Mekong Delta provinces. They did not provide further specifics.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Police emphasized that they had been fighting TIP well before the implementation in July 2004 of GVN Decree 130, which codified the responsibilities of government agencies in combating TIP. Since the issuance of the decree, provincial police have been given modest new resources -- VND 30 million

(USD 1,885) in 2004 -- from the central government to fight TIP.

However, their budget is insufficient. They asked for USG assistance to provide instruction and training to develop anti-TIP programs. They also pointed to the need for more information outreach and education, areas that are the responsibility of the provincial Women's Union. (Note: the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has provided training to police in seven project sites around Vietnam: Hanoi, Quang Ninh, Lang Son, Lao Cai, Tay Ninh, HCMC, and An Giang. According to UNODC Technical Adviser Troels Vester, UNODC does not have the funding to extend its training to Can Tho. End note.)

Women's Union

15. (SBU) In our subsequent meeting with the Can Tho Women's Union, Chairwoman Lu Thi Ngoc Anh and Vice-Chair Le Thanh Thuy detailed the organization's role in combating TIP. (Note: According to Decree 130, the Women's Union is responsible for educational outreach to combat TIP and for providing assistance to trafficking victims. End note.) Of the 19 staff members in the Can Tho Women's Union, four are responsible for anti-TIP outreach; three volunteers augment this staff.

16. (SBU) Ms. Anh said that the outreach efforts focus on women aged 18 to 25. Women's Union representatives travel to villages to teach vulnerable women and their families how to spot potential traffickers and understand their tactics, such as offering a target a well-paying job in another province or country. According to Ms. Anh, funding for the outreach comes from the GVN and the Asia Society.

17. (SBU) The Women's Union makes a distinction between victims of TIP (women forced to work as prostitutes) and victims of abusive marriages to foreigners. Although overseas marriages are legal, the Women's Union dislikes such marriages because of potential problems for Vietnamese women. The Women's Union representatives cited a case in Can Tho when a woman thought she

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was signing marriage papers with a Taiwanese man. In reality, the woman signed a document in Chinese (which she could not read) that obligated her to pay her husband's debts within seven years. The representatives said they believed that the phenomenon of Vietnamese women marrying Taiwanese men is on the decline in the province; the Women's Union claims that it is getting better at working with families to stop their daughters from marrying foreigners. The representatives told us they had been instructed by the central-level Women's Union to open a Marriage Assistance Center, similar to the one run by the Women's Union of Ho Chi Minh City, but have not made definitive plans yet.

18. (SBU) As part of its mission to assist victims of TIP, the Women's Union runs a shelter that provides job training, consulting, and health checks. The shelter opened in June 2005. Thus far, the shelter has helped 14 victims of TIP, two of whom are under 16 years old. Nine victims have returned to their families. Victims spend a minimum of two months in the shelter. The shelter has enough beds to accommodate up to 18 women.

19. (SBU) The Women's Union also provides vocational training for at-risk poor families in Can Tho Province. Vulnerable women are trained in cake decorating, hair styling, and sewing. We were shown a room where 40 young women and one young man were receiving sewing lessons. Two of the students we saw were TIP victims from the shelter. The room contained 48 modern sewing machines donated by the Japanese government. The students were making school uniforms that would be given to poor students in the province. The students are provided with food for lunch, or 10,000 VND per day to purchase lunch if they chose not to eat in the shelter (in many cases the lunch money is saved and given to their families). After training, the Women's Union helps place students in factories in Can Tho, both private and state-owned. The facility had sleeping quarters for 15 persons for those

trainees too far from home to return at the end of the day.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: The willingness of the police in Can Tho and in HCMC (ref B) to engage on TIP issues is encouraging. While attracting donor funding clearly is part of the motivation, there is a genuine desire on the part of the police to improve their efforts to develop and implement a comprehensive TIP program. The need is clear: the Can Tho police assertion that they have rescued 16 victims stands in sharp contrast to the 10,000 persons -- mostly from Mekong Delta provinces -- that some Vietnamese recently estimated have been trafficked in the past to Cambodia. (Note: Precise statistics on TIP are difficult to obtain. End Note.)

¶11. (SBU) Comment, continued: Our interaction with the Can Tho Women's Union suggests that provincial authorities in affected provinces increasingly are engaged on the issue. It also shows that they have a good understanding of the causes of TIP and some of the steps necessary to curb it. Although modest in size and scope, the Women's Union job training and placement program provides alternatives for potential victims to stay at home and not be lured to travel out of Vietnam to try to find work. End Comment.

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